

ST. ROBERT SOUTHWELL

by Solange Hertz

& What's New?

In the face of what looks like unprecedented crisis, a good thing to do is to pick up the nearest history book and start reading in the presence of God. As the ancient Preacher said, *What is it that hath been? The same that shall be. What is it that hath been done? The same that shall be done. Nothing under the sun is new, neither is there any man able to say: Behold this is new. For it has already gone before in the ages that were before us (Eccles. 1:9-10).* The past isn't just prologue, but the very pre-enactment of the present and future.

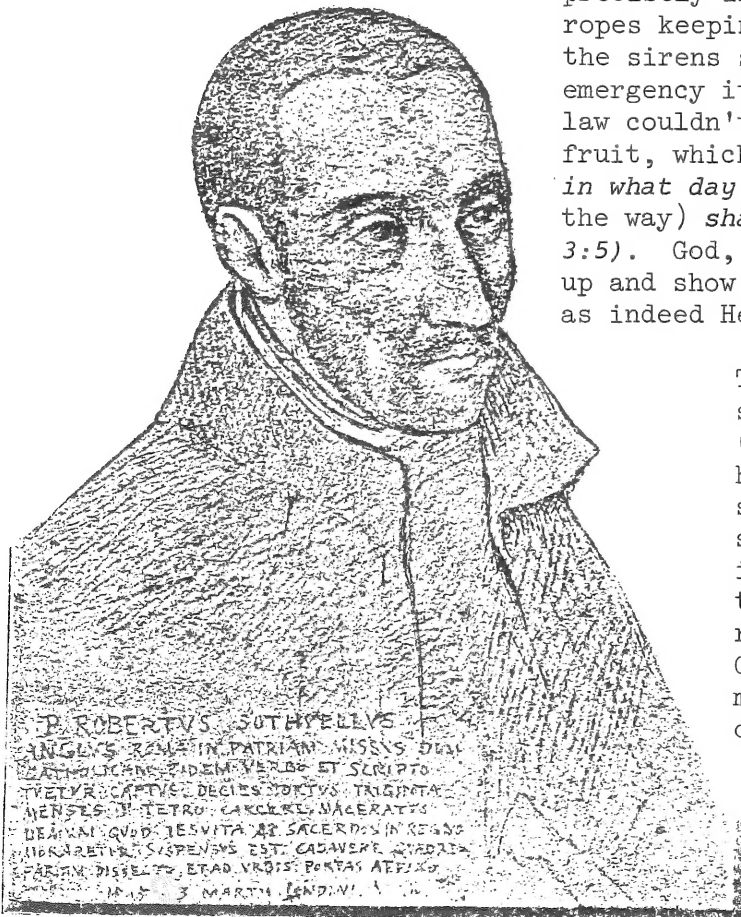
People, especially the pious, often believe they are facing some dilemma no one has ever faced before. That's because most of them don't live more than 80 years, and a third of that had to be spent in sleeping just to keep going. And people forget. Even when they remember, they are tied to their senses and all the confusing momentary data these relay to mind and passions for tabulation. It's normal to draw conclusions relating only to the immediate surroundings.

The devil, on the other hand, never forgets. His life span is forever, and he never sleeps. Being pure spirit he is furthermore unimpeded by matter in his thought process. And his will is set undeviatingly in one direction -- "seeking someone to devour." Instantly present wherever he acts, he has had thousands of years to study us, noting with satisfaction that human nature never changes. He better than anyone knows that man doesn't "evolve." This means he can use the same tricks on us over and over. When we fall for them, often as not he has persuaded us that we are confronted with a situation for which no rules have yet been worked out, and that the solution is all up to us.

Formal disobedience easily follows. Vows and laws, designed precisely in anticipation of the extraordinary -- the very ropes keeping Ulysses lashed to the mast of the ship when the sirens start singing -- are discarded in the name of the emergency itself. The old serpent told Mother Eve that God's law couldn't really apply in the instance of the forbidden fruit, which could hardly cause death, for, *God knows that in what day soever you (a plural pronoun in the Vulgate, by the way) shall eat thereof, your eyes shall be open (Gen. 3:5).* God, the devil implied, was waiting for Eve to grow up and show some initiative. He was simply testing her -- as indeed He was.

The trick still works. Schismatics of every shade, professing the most orthodox doctrine (which is what makes them schismatics and not heretics) are proliferating everywhere today, setting up ecclesiastical structures of all shapes and sizes "in" and out of Mother Church in the name of unprecedented emergency -- as if there hasn't been an Orthodox Church with valid rites and sacraments for nearly a thousand years! Good Catholics seek to justify these schemes by maintaining they have been betrayed by the heads of the Church herself, even by her Supreme Head.

So what's new? When Adam ratified Eve's initiative, each and every one of us was officially and formally betrayed by the head of the whole human race long before we were even conceived.



From a pencil drawing at Stonyhurst College

The pattern of "revolution from above" has not changed. The Son of God himself was condemned not by underlings, but by the highest ecclesiastical and secular authorities. He showed us how to defer to their authority, even unto death, all the while refusing in His actions to do "according to their works." He showed us the Cross.

Like everyone else, the devil has to work through divinely established channels to perpetrate any real evil. He can't create any new situations, but only shuffle the scenery. Only God can say, *Behold, I make all things new* (Apo. 21:5). . . . *A new commandment I give unto you* (John 13:34). Only He can put the "new song" into our mouths, reveal our "new name written," or seal a new Testament in His own Precious Blood (Apo. 14:3, 2:17; Matt. 26:28). Power to produce something new is a prerogative of divine omnipotence, closely akin to forgiving sins. Where men seem to have created a new situation, we need only look under the stage dressing to find the same old one which confronted Adam and then our Lord. One succumbed to the siren song of revolution, the Other did not.

With the same thing happening all the time, prophecy comes easily to those with grace to read the past correctly. Scripture itself, says St. Paul, was given as a prefiguration of what will happen to us, *upon whom the ends of the world are come* (1 Cor. 10:11). Although things will be essentially the same, however, there will be this difference: they will grow steadily worse until the climax is reached. Our Lord promised us, *There shall be then great tribulation, such as hath not been from the beginning of the world* (Matt. 24:21). St. Paul wrote the young bishop Timothy, *In the last days shall come dangerous times* (2 Tim. 3:1), so dangerous that we have our Lord's word for it that if those future days were not shortened by the divine mercy, no one could be saved (Matt. 24:22). As the devil gains ascendancy over sinful men, choices will narrow, deceptions become more clever in the fading light of the eclipsing Church.



The Jesuit martyr St. Fobert Southwell thought it was bad enough in England nearly 400 years ago when he wrote, *Now is the time in which many of our forefathers desired to live!* What would he say today?

You it is, whom God hath allotted to be the chief actors in this contest. From your veins He means to derive the streams that shall water His Church. He hath made choice of you to delight His friends, and confound His enemies, with the beauty and grace of your virtuous life and patient constancy. Now is the time come for the light of the world to blaze out; for the salt of the earth to season weak souls tending to corruption; yea, and for the good shepherd to spend his life for the defense of his silly flock. The pruning-time is come, and in order that the tree of the Church may sprout out more abundantly, the branches and boughs of full growth are lopped off. Now is the time come of which Christ forewarned us: "It shall come to pass, that he who killeth you shall think he doth God a service." Lo, the things that were said, are now done; and now, since that is fulfilled which was foretold, that which was promised will also be performed; our Lord himself assuring us: "When you see all these things come to pass, then know you that the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Where these words do not apply to some extent, there can be only one reason, for St. Paul told St. Timothy categorically that all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution (2 Tim. 3:12). Where some persecution is not felt in God's Church is where faith has come to terms with the world - if not battling to maintain the status quo in the name of religion.

As Fr. Southwell wrote, *When England was Catholic, she had many glorious confessors; it is for the honor and benefit of our country that it should be well stored with a number of martyrs; and we have now, God be thanked! such martyr-makers in authority as mean, if they have their will, to make saints enough to furnish all our churches with treasure, when it shall please God to restore them to their true honors; and doubt not but either they or their posterity shall see the very prisons of execution become places of reverence and devotion.*

England has yet to return to the Faith, for times have worsened. Reading English history we can learn some of the things to expect, for the situation that pertained there can now be said to exist within the Church herself. As a seminarian in Douai and Rome, Fr. Southwell searched like us for some historical precedent to enlighten him, and found a satisfactory one in the storm which decimated the Church in North Africa in the third century. There was indeed a close resemblance between what happened there and in England. At a time when the Church in Africa was so flourishing there seems to have been serious talk of shifting some

of the Roman administration to Carthage, two persecutions were unleashed upon it, the first under the Emperor Decius, the second under Valerian. From the first moment, thousands of Catholics, both priests and laity, rushed to the pagan temples to sacrifice or burn incense to the gods without waiting to be asked, rather than risk confiscation of their property, let alone death. The more wily, called *libellatici*, bought certificates from the imperial magistrates stating they had complied with the government order of worship whereas in reality they had not. The martyrs -- among them St. Perpetua and St. Felicity mentioned in the Holy Mass -- were great, but few and far between.

St. Cyprian, native Bishop of Carthage, ran for cover during the first persecution but vehemently excoriated both kinds of lapses. He managed to ready a valiant remnant for the second persecution, during which he laid down his own life with many others, but Christianity never recovered its former preeminence in Africa, being furthermore left in the grip of the Novatian schism, which raged for generations. (Arising from controversy over the canonical standing of defectors, these schismatics eventually set up an anti-pope to enforce their rigid disciplines against the lapsed - so characteristic of the schismatic mentality is merciless orthodoxy. St. Cyprian, Pope St. Cornelius and other Popes pled in vain for leniency and unity in regard to the penitent.)

Christians having never before fallen away in such unheard of numbers, many sincerely believed this was the Great Apostasy of the last days. This has been the normal assumption ever since wherever the Church herself seems to be defecting. Although many of the predicted signs are demonstrably present, and some major figure would seem to fit the description of the Antichrist, so far the conclusive proof postulated by our Lord has been conspicuously missing: the persecutor has not been publicly acclaimed by the Jews as their Messiah. He told them, *I am come in the name of my Father, and you receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him you will receive (John 5:43).*

Even St. Cyprian, like Fr. Southwell and all of us, seemed to have expected this false Messiah momentarily. He exhorted his flock, *Nor let any one of you, beloved brethren, be so terrified by the fear of future persecution, or the coming of the threatening Antichrist, as not to be found armed for all things by the evangelical exhortations and precepts, and by the heavenly warnings. Antichrist is coming, but above him comes Christ also!*



But today still, amid clearer and clearer apocalyptic signs, the number of apostates only keep growing. Once in the thousands, they can now be counted in the millions, all the while God continues distilling His saints at His divine leisure. As Fr. Southwell looked to St. Cyprian of Carthage for inspiration in his apostolate to the abandoned sheep of Elizabethan England, we can now look to him. The aforementioned quotation from him occurs in his *Epistle of Comfort*. Although a spiritual classic, it survives today in a huge body of some 300 volumes of English recusant literature now thumbed almost exclusively by scholars, but which once represented the herculean efforts of Catholic writers to keep the true Faith alive in English print in the avalanche of poisonous heretical works then only beginning to engulf the faithful the world over.

To the general run of posterity "Robert Southwell" is merely an English poet of acknowledged genius who wrote *The Burning Babe*. Anthologies occasionally mention his Catholic priesthood, but more likely limit themselves to pointing out his uncanny ability to make Elizabethan conceits and verse forms serve sacred subjects. His prose works, also using brilliant imagery, are always to the same religious purpose.

The English persecution can be said to have officially begun with Elizabeth's first Parliament, which introduced by law actual changes in worship and put legal sanctions behind them. By the close of 1587 the *Epistle* was ready, to strengthen the faithful who had taken a stand against Crammer's Mass, mostly by preparing them for the worst. Although its original title page reads "Imprinted at Paris," the work is printed on English paper and generally known to have rolled off the secret press operated in the very heart of London by Fr. Southwell's religious Superior, Fr. Henry Garnet, S.J.

Its main theme is the same as St. Thomas More's great *Dialogue of Comfort* penned in the Tower of London before his execution nearly a half century before. Both expound the great supernatural reasons for standing firm against the enemy, but whereas the layman More approaches the problem speculatively, as a philosopher meditating Psalm 90 and the four basic temptations figured therein, Fr. Southwell approaches it as a priest and pastor of souls. Exuding

immediacy and urgency, the *Epistle* is intensely practical, and small wonder, for it began as a series of letters smuggled to the imprisoned St. Philip Howard, Earl of Arundel and Surrey, to sustain him during the long captivity in which he died, bereft all the while of the Sacraments and Catholic company of any kind. A godson of Philip II of Spain and an erstwhile favorite of Elizabeth's, the young Earl had cut short a worldly, pleasure-seeking court life which had caused his wife much suffering, by a sudden fervent conversion to the Faith and an impolitic refusal to attend the new church services. The Jesuit martyr never met him, but a deep spiritual friendship developed by correspondence, and they were eventually both canonized on the same day in 1970 A.D.

It is his letters to the young Earl that Fr. Southwell later collected and revised for general consumption by deleting from them particulars which would have applied only to the original recipient. The *Epistle* makes fulsome use of what the Earl's pious wife dubbed "the blessed Fr. Southwell's remedy" for fear: To imagine the very worst, to expect it, and to offer it up beforehand to almighty God in union with the sufferings of the Redeemer before anything happened to shake one's resolve. Keeping before his readers the supernatural nature of their trial, he bids them look at the four great consolations persecution offers them:

First, It must needs be a great comfort to those that, either reclaimed from schism or heresy, or from a dissolute life to the constant profession of the Catholic faith, are, for that cause, persecuted by Satan and his instruments: for it is a very great sign that they are delivered out of his power, and accounted by him as sheep of God's flock, seeing that otherwise he would never so heavily pursue them. . . It is not for us to regard the slanders of men, or to desert the service of God for them, seeing that it is but a very slender excuse to allege the fear or words of a vassal as a just impediment for not performing our duty towards our Sovereign. The friendship of this world is an enemy to God. . . .

Secondly, we should willingly undergo persecution also because "whom God loveth He chastiseth, and scourgeth every child He receiveth." . . The vanities of this world cast the soul into so delightsome a frenzy, and lull it so dangerously asleep, that many, in a fit of licentiousness, run headlong to perdition, and while they rejoice they rave; and others, in a careless and remiss kind of life, sleep themselves to death. . . To wean us from an unnatural nurse, God anointeth her breast with the bitterness of tribulation.

And in the third place, one . . . cannot but think it a most comfortable thing to suffer adversity for a good cause; seeing that it is not only the livery and cognizance of Christ, but the very garment of royalty which He chose to wear in this life. . . And surely now is the time that we are called by Christ through fire and water, and now with loud voice doth He renew His old proclamation: "Whoever loveth father, mother, wife, children, house or living more than Me, is not worthy of Me; and he that taketh not up his cross and follow Me, cannot be My disciple." . . . What comfort can a man reap in a place that is governed by the Prince of darkness, and peopled with our enemies and the enemies of God; where vice is advanced, virtue scorned, the bad rewarded and the good oppressed?

But in the fourth place, to come to the principal drift of my discourse, what more forcible things can I set before your eyes, as motives to comfort you in your tribulation, than the cause of your persecution, the honor of your present estate, and the future reward of your patient and constant sufferance? And first, as to the cause that you defend -- which is no less than the only true and Catholic religion. You defend that Church which is avouched by all antiquity; confirmed by the blood of martyrs; gainsaid by the heretics of all ages and most undoubtedly approved by all concurring testimonies. You defend that Church of Rome to which, as St. Cyprian says, "misbelief can have no access, and which can receive no forgery." . . . But, on the other side, two hundred founders of new sects that have been since Christ's time, though they have for a season flourished and prevailed, having emperors and potentates to defend them,



AN EPISTLE OF COMFORT, TO THE RE- VEREND PRIESTES, &

TO THE HONORABLE,
Worshipful, & other of the
Laye sort restrayned in Du-
rance for the Catholicke

Fayth.



•Matt. 11

*Regnum cœlorum vim patitur,
et violenti, rapiunt illud.*

The Kingdome of heauen suffereth
violence, and the violent beare
it awaye.

Deus tibi se, Tu te Deo.

IMPRINTED AT P ARIS.

infinite books and writings to divulge their doctrines, and all temporal aids to set them forward; yet we see that their memory is quite abolished, their names commonly unknown, and no more mention of them than the condemnation and disproof of their errors, recorded by Catholic writers. The same, doubtless will be the end of the novelties of our days, which being only parts of their corruptions, revived and raked out of oblivion, as heretofore they vanished with their devisers, so will they now with their revivers. More than other things under the sun, heresy is never new!

Yet, so ripe is heresy grown, so infinite the sects and divisions into which it has spread, besides new ones daily uprising, that the variety of religions, and the uncertainty which among so many is truest, hath made the greatest part of our country to believe none at all. And this, in truth, is the end and last step to which heresy bringeth a man. Seeing therefore that the ship of St. Peter now saileth, not against the wind of one evil spirit, or against the stress of one flood of heresy, but against a tide of all the pestilent spirits of former ages, and against the mainstream of all heresy; it is no less necessary than glorious for us to employ our last endeavors in the defense thereof; and think our limbs happily lost, our blood blessedly bestowed, our lives most honorably spent in this so noble and important a cause.

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St. Robert sealed these words with his own blood and dismembered limbs at Tyburn on February 21, 1595. It would be hard to believe he wasn't writing for us, who are now at grips with an evil Pope St. Pius X labelled the compendium of all heresies, which has decimated Christendom not only as a political entity, but is now leaving gaping voids in every family circle. That so far it has relied so little on open physical violence is proof of its power and virulence. Your adversaries are mighty, their force very great, their vantage not unknown, their malice experienced: but your Captain has always conquered, your cause has always in the end advanced, your predecessors never lost the field; wherefore, then, should you have less hope of the victory? Christianity is a warfare, and Christians spiritual soldiers. . . Now cometh the winnowing with his fan to see who is blown away like light chaff, and who resists the blasts like massy wheat. . . many seem faithful in the calm of the Church, but when the blasts of adversity bluster against them, few are found in the fruit of martyrdom.

Ever envisaging the worst, St. Robert proceeds to show the tremendous spiritual advantages to be found in prison. For though prisons be in themselves the folds of Satan, to harbor his lewd flock, yet when the cause ennobles the name of prisoner, the prisoner abolishes the dishonor of the place. What thing of old more odious than the cross? What place more abhorred than the Mount of Calvary? . . . Think not of the name prison, and you will find it a retiring place fittest to serve God. . . a school of divine and hidden mysteries to God's friends, where Joseph learned to decipher dreams, Samson recovered his strength and Manassas was converted. St. Robert's experience of prison life was not academic. Before undergoing torture and imprisonment himself, he had contrived to visit many prisoners secretly, even whole groups of them. His one recorded sermon and one of his finest prose works, *Mary Magdalen's Funeral Tears*, was delivered on her feast day in London's famous Clink only a month after his arrival from the continent. So, if it comes to martyrdom, so much the better. We must all die anyway. Why, therefore should we fear that which cannot be avoided? . . . He dies old enough who dies good. . . The baptism of blood surpasses that of water, for it is the greatest point of charity by God's own testimony.

Fr. Southwell concludes the *Epistle* by upbraiding those Catholics who have submitted to the new English religion out of false obedience to their superiors, for the scandal they give, in confirming the obstinacy of misbelievers, in weakening and overthrowing the faith of the faint-hearted and wavering. He speaks of the danger of infection by (the reformers') contagious speeches, that creep and corrode like canker. To the would-be ecumenists he says, I wish not to expose your contempt of the canon of the Apostles, of the Council of Laodicea and divers others forbidding to resort to the prayers or conventicles of heretics; of the example of all antiquity condemning the same; of the verdict and common consent of the profoundest writers in Christendom; and in particular, of the choice men in the Tridentine Council who, after long sifting and examining this point, in the end found it altogether unlawful, and avouched it better to suffer all kind of torments than yield to it. Yea, although they were desired not to make this a public decree, in respect to the troubles that might arise to the Catholics in England, in whose behalf the question of going to church was proposed; yet the Legate and the aforesaid Fathers gave this answer, - that they would have this resolution no less accounted of than if it were the censure of the whole Council.

Fr. Southwell reminds his readers of their duty to give good example. *The more exquisite the rigors our enemies exercise against us, the greater is the allurements of others to our religion. . . everyone seeing such constancy is cast into some scruple. But alas, Many of them, yielding before the battle . . . have not left themselves so much as this excuse - that they went to church unwillingly. They offer themselves voluntarily; they run unwittingly to their ruin, and seem rather to embrace a thing before desired than to yield to an occasion they would fain have avoided. And did not your feet stumble, your eyes grow dim, your hearts quake and your bodies tremble when you came into the polluted synagogue? Could the servant of Christ abide in that place? . . . Could you come hither to offer your prayers unto God? . . . Will you seek to shelter yourselves under the pretext that you are in mind Catholics, and that you come to church only to obey the law?*

He reminds these weak Catholics, *You carry also with you your dear innocents . . . thus training your little ones to destruction, unlike the good mother in Macchabees who rather exhorted her children to martyrdom than to offend by saving their lives. He warns, Divers heretics will be witnesses against you in the day of judgment, for, (quoting St. Cyprian), If the faith that conquers be crowned, the perfidiousness that betrays must be chastised. In every age the wavering side with an illusory majority, lacking the spiritual sight of the prophet Eliseus who reminded Israelites besieged by the Syrian multitudes, Fear not, for there are more with us than with them (4 Kgs. 6:16).*

In St. Thomas More's *Dialogue of Comfort* there is a fine passage illustrating this truth: *Now, if it were . . . that you should be brought through the broad high street of a great city, and that all along the way that you were going, there were on the one side of the way a rabble of ragged beggars and madmen, that would despise and dispraise you, with all the shameful names that they could call you, and all the villainous words that they could say to you; and that there were then all along the other side of the same street . . . a goodly company standing in a fair range, a row of wise and worshipful folk, allowing and commending you, more than fifteen times as many as that rabble of ragged beggars and railing madmen are: would you cease your progress willingly, believing that you went unto your shame, because of the shameful jesting and railing of those mad, foolish wretches? Or hold on your way with a good cheer and a glad heart, thinking yourself much honored by the laud and approbation of that other honorable sort? A trenchant appraisal of the militant Catholic here below who sides with the real majority in the Church - the countless angelic hosts and the multitudes of blessed martyrs and saints already in heaven.*

St. Robert likewise begs them not to go to perdition with the faithless for company's sake. *. . . Let not the example of those that fall make you weaker. If they had been of us they would have stayed with us. We should rejoice when the wolves are separated from the sheep of Christ. . . Let no man imagine that the good go out of the Church. The wind carries not away the wheat, neither does the storm overthrow the trees that are strong rooted. He closes with a description of what heaven will be like, and the words, Not he who begins, but he who perseveres unto the end shall be saved.*



Although responsible for many conversions in the course of the strenuous underground ministry he exercised for some six miraculous years around London before being caught, St. Robert was not concerned with non-Catholics. He saw his duty in supplying the desperate needs of the uprooted faithful who were merely trying to save their souls amid the general apostasy. He contrived to reach not only those who were in prison, like the Earl, and perhaps facing the supreme penalty, but larger numbers like the Earl's wife, the Countess Anne Dacres, who were trying to live good Catholic lives at large, isolated from most of society, and yet courting certain danger by worshipping in secret. To this end he wrote the *Short Rule of a Good Life*,* which issued from Fr. Garnet's press shortly after its author's martyrdom. It was coupled with the beautiful and poignant long *Letter to His Father*,* Richard Southwell, exhorting him to return to the Faith. This gentleman had made fatal compromises in hopes of saving the family fortune, but found grace with God after his son's sacrifice. In 1600 Fr. Garnet

* These works are currently available in one volume from the Folger Shakespearean Library in Washington, D.C., unfortunately in a tampered Protestant version, but the original passages are supplied in an Appendix.

A

SHORT

RULE OF GOOD LIFE.

To direct the devout Christian in a regular and orderly course.

Newly set forth according to the Author's direction before his death.

Set me downe, O Lord, a law in thy way. Psal. 118.
ibidem.

I sayd, o Lord, that it is my portion and all my riches, to keepe thy law.

wrote his Jesuit superior, Mr. Southwell, Robert's father, has just died a Catholic.

The saint's name did not appear on the volume, but everyone knew the notorious Fr. Southwell had written it, and so great was his literary reputation throughout England, it circulated freely. After a half century of religious chaos the English were so desperate for good spiritual direction, that even the heretics made use of it. Some of the editions boasted official sanction. Purged of references to saints, mortal and venial sin and Catholic practices, the *Short Rule* emerged in Anglican dress as the reformers' own doctrine. This was not uncommon practice on their part, for tampering was more profitable than outright suppression, always difficult to enforce. A like fate overtook Fr. Persons' edition of Loarte's *Christian Directory*, cleverly modified by a Calvinist divine.

As practical and immediate as the *Epistle*, the *Short Rule* is generally acknowledged to have been written for the Countess of Arundel. Her saintly personal life was a great credit in any case to Fr. Southwell's spiritual direction, for this gracious, valiant woman risked her life daily to help him and many other priests reach as many Catholics as possible, affording the lodging, material helps and protection without which their ministry would soon have foundered. Not the least of her contributions to the cause was the aforementioned printing press. One of the Catholic counties of Maryland bears her name today.

On reading the *Rule* one is struck first by its crashing lack of originality. The work of a highly imaginative poet, its contents are pretty much an Ignatian version of hard-headed old Catholic doctrine and precepts handed down for generations. If the author were not known, it would be hard to discern from the text that it was written during a period of intense persecution, when the most respected, long-standing Catholic families were being systematically shattered, robbed and humiliated for refusing to accept a man-made reform soon to cast out an entire Christian nation for hundreds of years from the Church Christ founded. One of the few clues to the contemporary scene occurs in a section headed *On the Care of My Children*, where parents are urged to *tell them often of the abbeyes, and the virtue of the old monks and friars, and other priests and religious women*. Needless to say, this passage did not escape the Anglican editor, who replaced it with, *tell them often of the virtue of their predecessors, and of the truth and honesty of the old time and the iniquity of ours*.

Never at any time does the author descend to personal invective, or a mention of those laboring to destroy the Faith among his contemporaries. He lays down in the first chapter: *I cannot serve God in this world, nor go about to enjoy Him in the next, but that God's enemies and mine will repine and seek to hinder me: which enemies are three. Elizabeth? Cranmer? Perhaps Sir Francis Walsingham and his bloodhound Richard Topcliffe? Hardly. The enemies he speaks of are far more formidable, and more ancient: the world, the flesh and the devil.*

Wherefore I must resolve myself and set it down as a thing undoubted that my whole life must be a continual combat with these adversaries, whom I must assuredly persuade myself do lie hourly in wait for me to seek their advantage, and that their malice is so implacable and their hatred against me so rooted in them that I must never look to have one hour secure from their assaults, but that they will from time to time, so long as there is breath in my body, still labor to make me forsake and offend God, allure me to their service, and draw me to my damnation. Thus does he strike the nub of all persecution in England or elsewhere. Had every English Catholic been living by the principles outlined in the Countess' *Rule*, Cranmer and his revolution would not have collapsed, but never happened, because there would have been no need of him to purify the souls of the elect.

How reassuring therefore to find nothing new in all these pages! Their whole tenor is how to maintain union with God by the perfect accomplishment of His holy Will. It is the ancient science of the saints, for whom God's will soars above every other means of union, even the Eucharist. For instance, St. Robert makes no mention of spiritual Communion, a practice so useful, and recommended to those deprived of the Sacraments. But why should he? If the *Rule* is followed, one's whole life becomes one unbroken spiritual Communion continuing without interruption into eternity.

The baptized under persecution may not be able to attend Mass, but they can live it in their flesh by mystical union with Christ in prayer and suffering. Where it is impossible to have both, mere attendance pales by comparison, in cases where God himself has removed the liturgical wraps from the essential reality. Sometimes it would seem that we must be torn periodically from Sacraments and liturgy in order to be forcibly reminded of their divine Source. Many saints have suffered this trial. Persecution stands at the summit of the Beatitudes, for your reward is very great in heaven (Matt. 5:12).

St. Cyprian, who fought to preserve the same Latin rite Mass which is proscribed everywhere today, and for which Fr. Southwell laid down his life, had this to say to the heretics of his day: *If in the sacrifice Christ offered no one is to be imitated but Christ, we must beyond doubt obey and do what Christ did, and what He commanded to be done; since in the Gospel He tells us: "You are my friends if you do the things I command you" (John 15:14). . . So if Christ alone is to be listened to, we must pay no attention to what another thinks is to be done, but do what Christ who is above all first did. We are not to follow after the notions of men, but the truth of God; since God says to us by His prophet Isaias: "In vain do they worship Me, teaching the doctrines and the commands of men" (29:13). And in the Gospel He says this same thing: "Making void the word of God by your own tradition, which you have given forth" (Mark 4:13).*

And He lays it down again in another place, and says: *"He therefore that shall break one of these least commandments, and shall so teach men, shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:19). And if it is not lawful to undo even the least of the Lord's commandments, how much more is it unlawful to break those that are so grave, so serious, so closely related to the mystery of the Lord's Passion, and to our own Redemption, or to change into something else, because of some human notion, that which has been divinely handed down to us?*

Living the Mass in prefiguration in the midst of the fiery furnace in Babylon, the good Azarias prayed, *We, O Lord, are diminished more than any nation, and are brought low in all the earth this day for our sins. Neither is there at this time prince or leader, or prophet, or holocaust, or sacrifice, or oblation, or incense, or place of first-fruits before Thee, that we may find mercy: nevertheless in a contrite heart and humble spirit let us be accepted. As in holocausts of rams and bullocks, and as in thousands of fat lambs: so let our sacrifice be made in Thy sight this day, that it may please Thee: for there is no confusion to them that trust in Thee (Dan. 4:37-40).*

The picture was just as bleak for English Catholics in Fr. Southwell's day. Although St. Pius V had excommunicated and deposed Elizabeth, relieving her subjects of all allegiance to her, he had died before being able to organize the military expedition designed to enforce the Bull, and the two organized by his successor Gregory XIII had both failed through treachery. The spiritual state of Europe was such that exterior means had lost all power. In the Short Rule St. Robert therefore counsels the penitent, *a perfect resignation of myself into God's hands, with a full desire that He should use me as it were to His glory, whether it were to my temporal comfort or no. And to be as ready to serve Him in misery, need and affliction as in prosperity and pleasure, thinking it my chiefest delight to be used as God will, and to have His pleasure and providence fully accomplished in me, which is the end for which I was created and for which I do now live. . . To which these considerations may help me:*

First, the end I aim at is God's glory in this world and His reward in the next; and therefore, knowing that nothing but my voluntary sin can bar me from this end, what need I much care by what means God will have me attain it? For the means can last but a little, and the end endureth forever and is so much the more comfortable in that it has been achieved with more discomfortable toils.

Secondly, God loves me more than I love myself, and is so wise that He best sees what is fittest for me, all present and future circumstances considered. He is so mighty that what His wisdom and love shall conclude for my good His power can put into execution; and therefore let me rather yield myself wholly to His providence than mine own desires.

Thirdly, whatsoever moves me to fear or dislike anything which I could not frame my mind to bear, God sees it as well and far better than I, yea, and all other secret and unknown hazards that are annexed to that thing. If there He knowing all these things will nevertheless let it happen to me, I must assure myself that it proceeds of love and is for my greater good, and that having laid a heavy burden upon weak forces will by His grace supply all my fears, wants and frailties.

We can imagine what impact such words must have had when the public read them, so soon

after the cruel martyrdom God had let happen to their author. Fr. Garnet's Preface to the Reader runs, The author of this little book, gentle reader, I nothing doubt but is very well known to thee, as also for his learning, piety, zeal, charity, fortitude and other rare singular qualities, but especially for his precious death he is renowned in the world abroad. Neither needeth there any extraordinary vision, but the sound and certain doctrine of the Catholic Church is sufficient to persuade that he is a most glorious saint in heaven... But because thou shouldst not be ignorant of the way by which this valiant champion of Christ arrived unto so happy a country, he himself hath left behind him for thy benefit, and even among the last of his fruitful labors for the good of souls had designed to publish unto the world the description of this most gainful voyage to heaven . . . the Short Rule of a Good Life.

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For Fr. Southwell and many others the title might have been more aptly Good Rule for a Short Life. As St. Thomas More put it in his *Dialogue of comfort*, There is no born Turk so cruel to Christian folk as is the false Christian that falleth from the faith. Where Master Rich was not lacking to St. Thomas, nor Judas to Christ, neither were false brethren lacking to the besieged Catholics in England. Sir Francis Walsingham, Elizabeth's Secretary of State and Chief of Security, had agents even among the English seminarians studying abroad for the priesthood, who not only served as informants, but fomented every possible dissension among clergy and students.

Others, posing as Catholics and moving in the clandestine Mass groups, became adept at enrolling the weaker members in little plots and counter-plots and then denouncing them to the authorities. The most famous of these machinations by far was the so-called *Babington Plot* named after the unfortunate Anthony Babington whom Walsingham chose for the role of "patsy," as we would say today. Ostensibly rigged to assassinate Elizabeth and enthrone Mary Queen of Scots as the rightful English monarch, this conspiracy was entirely concocted by the enemy. It brought to ruin and the gallows not only the Catholics directly implicated, together with those who unknowingly befriended them, but provided the long sought for pretext for the execution of Mary, who had in no way promoted it, although she had been told of it. Even Fr. Southwell, lately arrived in England, had barely escaped being innocently involved.

So consummate had been the deception, he had at first believed the plot was indeed the exclusive work of Catholics. In his *Humble Supplication to Her Majesty* (penned to protest the Proclamation of 1591 branding priests like himself as dissolute agents of Spain), the nobly born Jesuit is able later to inform Elizabeth that Walsingham's spy Robert Poley was the chief instrument to contrive and prosecute the matter, to draw into the net such green wits as . . . might easily be overwrought by Mr. Secretary's subtle and sifting wit. For Poley masking his secret intentions under the face of religion, and abusing with irreligious hypocrisy all rites and sacraments to borrow the false opinion of a Catholic, still fed the poor gentleman (Babington) with his master's baits, and he holding the line in his hand, suffered them like silly fishes to play themselves upon the hook till they were thoroughly fastened, that then he might strike at his own pleasure, and be sure to draw them to a certain destruction.

The destruction was thorough once the trap was sprung. In *An Autobiography from the Jesuit Underground*, Fr. William Weston later wrote, On one side of my room was the public road. On the other the river Thames. Throughout the day and, I think, for several days that followed, great crowds gathered in the street cheering and making merry. They piled up masses of wood and set fire to them, then stood around, talking wildly all the time against the Pope, the King of Spain, against Catholics and the Queen of Scots; and not the least, as you can guess, against the Jesuits. . . On the other side of the river the sight was more terrible still. Catholics, tied hand and foot, were ferried across the river, up and down between the Tower and Westminster where the trials were held. . . For the space of at least six or seven weeks this was my daily spectacle. During all that time the trials were conducted, death sentences pronounced on many gentlemen and the executions carried out.

Fr. Southwell writes in the *Supplication*: All highways were watched, infinite houses searched, hues and cries raised, frights bruited in people's ears, as though the whole realm had been on fire, whereas in truth it was but the hissing of a few green twigs of their own kindling, which they might without any such uproar have quenched with a handful of water. And again, As for this action of Babington, it was in truth rather a snare to entrap them than any device of their own, since it was both plotted, furthered and finished by Sir Francis Walsingham and his other complices, who laid and hatched all the particulars thereof, as they thought it would best fall out of the discredit of Catholics and cutting off the Queen of Scots.

His personal estimation of the Scottish queen is best revealed in a stanza of a poem he composed at her death, rarely found in anthologies :

*Alive a Queen, now dead I am a Saint;
Once Mary called, my name now Martyr is;
From earthly reign debarréd by restraint,
In lieu whereof I reign in heavenly bliss . .*

Using poetic license to the full, Fr. Southwell found no difficulty in canonizing England and Scotland's rightful sovereign. May the Church set her seal on her in time! By God's grace she like him achieved the perfect solution to religious persecution. As St. Cyprian said, *This is He; our God! Not the God of all men, but of the faithful, and of those who believe in Him, who when He comes at His second Coming, shall appear openly and not keep silence. . . Let us wait for Him, dearly beloved, our Judge and our Avenger; who shall revenge, together with Himself, the people of His Church and the number of all the just from the beginning of the world.*

There is no such thing as a political solution to a battle not waged against flesh and blood, beyond the sphere of politics, and Fr. Southwell never proposed any by either word or deed. In any age what is this but an escape from suffering by substituting the natural for the supernatural? At the dawn of Marxism the Russian philosopher Berdyaev pointed out how this modern political solution, like all the others, is nothing but a categorical flight from the Cross. The Marxist, says he, *will not accept a world whose creation is accompanied by the sufferings of human beings. He wants to destroy that world and create a new one where suffering does not exist. God created an unjust world full of suffering, and therefore He must be rejected for moral reasons. . . The only thing to pit against integral Communism, materialistic Communism, is integral Christianity.*

Like Isaias pleading with Achaz "at the conduit of the upper pool" to trust God and not come to terms with the enemies besieging Jerusalem (Is.7), Fr. Southwell never ceased proposing integral Christianity, but he was heeded little more than the prophet, for by the 17th century the enemy had literally poisoned the whole recusant body with the bait of political solutions. Suspicion and in-fighting reduced Catholic resistance to abject begging for co-existence with the "separated brethren." Under Lord Baltimore the "political solution" came to America, where it soon developed into the major heresy called Americanism, now infecting the world.

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If Fr. Southwell, like Christ, was immune to political temptations, again, like his Master, he was not immune to betrayal. He was caught at Uxenden, home of the Bellamys, a staunch Catholic family who had also befriended St. Edmund Campion, Fr. Persons, Fr. Weston, Fr. Garnet and many others. Two of its sons were put to death, a third tortured and exiled, with the mother left to die in prison, as innocent victims of the Babington plot. Tragically, it was a daughter of the house, Anne Bellamy, who was prevailed upon to betray him. This unfortunate young woman had gone valiantly to prison for her faith, but was raped there by Topcliffe and became pregnant.

Christopher Devlin puts it thus in his biography of the saint : *Anne in her misery was to be offered the hope of saving her family from all future vexation by enticing Southwell to spend one night under their roof, informing Topcliffe meanwhile of the time and hiding-place. Thus the Bellamys would be caught in a position where only Topcliffe's personal favor could preserve their lives and property.* The ploy had actually been concocted by one Nicholas Jones, a servant of Topcliffe's with high ambitions. *Well before her child was due, Anne would be married to Nicholas Jones - but married in church with the blessing of her parents, and with the rich Manor of Preston from the Bellamy lands as her dowry. In the event, five innocent people, three men and two women, died in great pain, and several others were ruined, in order to provide the weaver's son (Jones) with a country-house.*

It was as Mrs. Nicholas Jones that Anne Bellamy testified against St. Robert Southwell at his trial. He was executed the following day.

So what's new? He was only 34, but as he had put it to the young Earl, *He dies old enough who dies good!*

St. Robert Southwell, please pray for us.

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